

Don't let Trump slow climate action

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Body

Leaders of the 20 biggest economic powers meet in Hamburg today and all eyes will inevitably be on the first face-to-face encounter between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin. The world will also be looking for any sign that the leaders can calm rising tensions in Korea, and whether they can still look to the United States under Trump for global leadership.

Amid all that, one crucial issue risks being shuffled aside - climate change. It may be the most serious long-term problem for the planet, but the other G20 leaders may be tempted to downplay it just to make sure their summit isn't derailed by an open confrontation with Trump.

They shouldn't duck the issue. No one can stop Trump from pursuing his reckless path, pulling out of the most important global attempt to slow the impact of climate change. His decision to withdraw from the Paris Accord was perhaps the most destructive action he has taken in his presidency so far - and that's saying a lot.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel, chair of this year's G20 summit, wanted to put climate change at the top of the leaders' agenda. She needs the support of other countries, including Canada, to resist attempts by the Trump administration to water down what they finally agree to.

The evidence is mounting that the world simply can't afford to ignore the problem, regardless of the political difficulties. Better to risk a break with Trump than to kick this can down the road once again.

In the past week alone, dozens of leading scientists, business leaders, economists and thinkers issued an appeal in the journal *Nature* under the headline "Three years to safeguard our climate." They argue persuasively that action is needed now to make sure greenhouse gas emissions do not continue to rise beyond the year 2020. Otherwise, they say, "the temperature goals set in Paris become almost unattainable."

The good news, they write, is that there's still time to act. The bad news is that the window is small and closing. If world leaders avoid the issue to avoid a clash with Washington, they will be abdicating a major responsibility.

Putting the brakes on progress now would be particularly tragic because real gains are being made. As the scientists and others write in *Nature*, the shift away from carbon-based energy is already underway and is having positive effects in many parts of the world. Emissions fell by 3 per cent last year in the United States, and even in China they were down by 1 per cent as that country moved toward hydro and wind power.

At the same time, investors are becoming increasingly wary of betting on companies that rely on fossil fuels. Big hedge funds are demanding that energy companies account for the impact of measures to fight climate change on their future profits. Money speaks loudly - and more and more it is demanding action on climate issues.

The *Nature* writers lay out six areas for urgent action - including making renewable energy 30 per cent of the world's total by 2020, dramatically increasing the number of electric vehicles, and widening the market for "green

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bonds" to finance climate-mitigation efforts. Without such steps, they warn, "the conditions for human prosperity will be severely curtailed."

Underscoring their message, more and more evidence is emerging that the effects of climate change are real.

Sea levels are rising more quickly, caused in part by melting of the ice sheet that covers Greenland. Carbon in the atmosphere is rising, even though the amount of carbon being pumped into the atmosphere has levelled off, possibly because the oceans and other "natural sponges" that absorb the chemical have reached their limit. And scientists are drawing direct links between climate change and extreme weather - such as the recent heat wave in Europe.

In light of all this, it's vital that the G20 leaders don't bow to the Trump administration's insistence that climate change is an illusion - even, in the president's own words, just a "hoax" concocted by China to cripple the American economy.

Trump's decision in June to withdraw the U.S. from the Paris Agreement on climate change was the logical result of that thinking. At the time, other leading countries vowed to continue efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and one of the first tests of their resolve will come at the Hamburg summit.

It's far from clear what the outcome will be. Merkel has vowed to uphold the accord, calling it "irreversible." And in an obvious reference to Trump she told the German parliament last week that "we can't, and we won't, wait until the last person on Earth is convinced of the scientific evidence for climate change."

But Trump's climate skepticism has given some other countries cover to back away from the accord, as many had feared. Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Russia and Turkey, according to the New York Times, are watering down their support for the agreement.

And there are other reports that an "action plan" on climate prepared for discussion at the Hamburg summit contains major concessions to Trump. According to one report, it removes a 2025 deadline for ending fossil fuel subsidies, eliminates a call for carbon pricing, and even defines some coal power as "clean technologies." It would, in other words, kneecap global climate goals in order to avert a head-on confrontation with the Trump administration.

Such an outcome would be an enormous mistake. It would fly in the face of scientific evidence on the issue and take the wind out of the sails of countries (like Canada) that have pledged to meet their goals under the Paris accord regardless of Washington's position.

Trump is taking the United States down an irresponsible path on climate change, one that will harm both his country and others. He is abdicating leadership on the issue and the rest of the world should resist him, not allow themselves to be led astray.

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